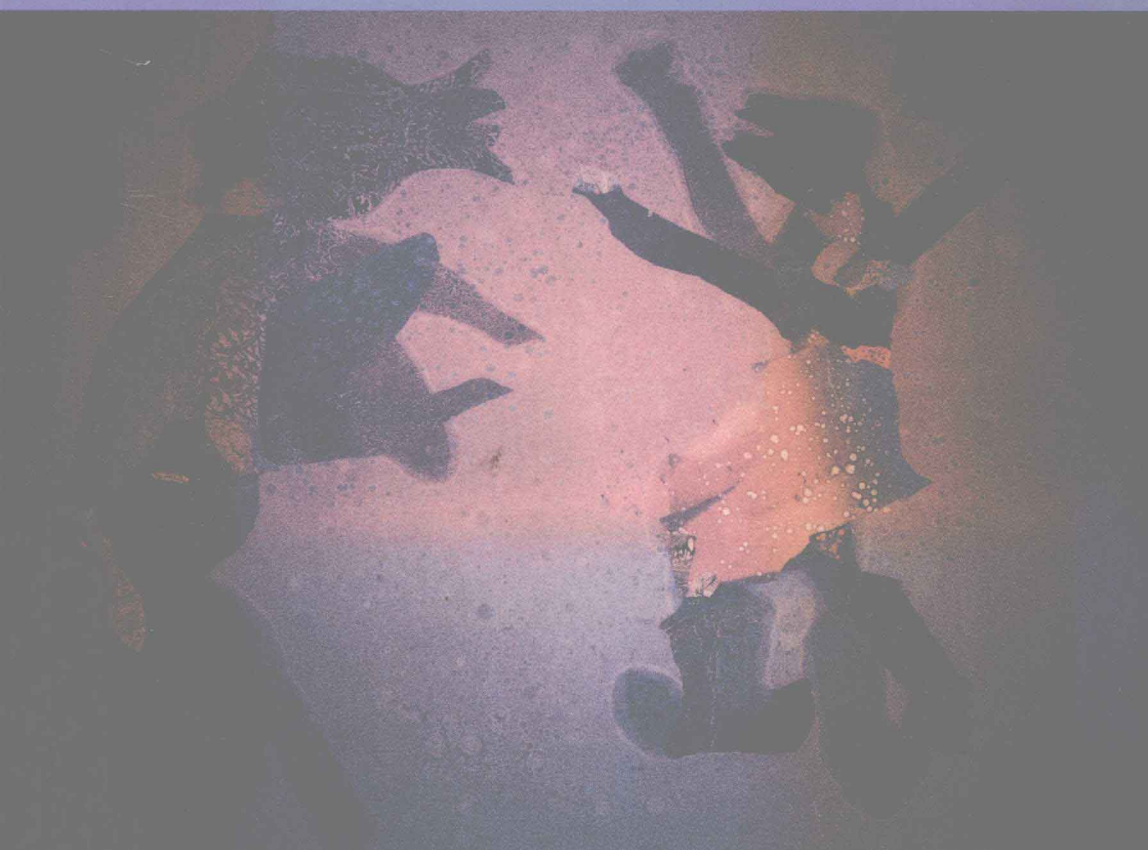


COMMUNICATING WITH STRANGERS

AN APPROACH TO INTERCULTURAL
COMMUNICATION

SECOND EDITION

WILLIAM B. GUDYKUNST
YOUNG YUN KIM



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WITH STRANGERS

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TO INTERCULTURAL
COMMUNICATION

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An Approach to Intercultural Communication

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

William B. Gudykunst is a professor of speech communication at California State University, Fullerton. He received his B.A. and M.A. degrees in sociology at Arizona State University. After completing his M.A., Bill spent three years on active duty with the U.S. Navy stationed in Yokosuka, Japan. He became interested in intercultural communication while serving as an Intercultural Relations Specialist in the Navy. Bill helped develop the Navy's intercultural relations seminar, which was designed to help Naval personnel and their families adjust to living in Japan. After being released from active duty, Bill went to the University of Minnesota where he completed his Ph.D. in 1977.

Bill has written extensively on cross-cultural and intercultural communication. In addition to *Communicating with Strangers*, he has written *Bridging Differences: Effective Intergroup Communication* (Sage, 1991) and *Culture and Interpersonal Communication* (with Stella Ting-Toomey; Sage, 1988). He also has edited *Intercultural Communication Theory* (Sage, 1983), *Intergroup Communication* (Edward Arnold, 1986), and *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication* (with Molefi Asante; Sage, 1989), among others.

Young Yun Kim received her M.A. in 1972 in communication from the University of Hawaii and her Ph.D. in 1976 from Northwestern University. She formerly taught at Governors State University in Illinois, and is currently a professor of communication at the University of Oklahoma. Professor Kim's research focus has been on the function of communication in the cross-cultural adaptation process of immigrants and ethnic minorities. She has conducted studies on various ethnic groups including American Indians, Indochinese refugees, Japanese, Koreans, and Mexicans. Professor Kim is currently investigating the role of communication competence in promoting relationships between individuals of different cultural and subcultural backgrounds. Her articles have been published in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *Human Communication Research*, and the *International and Intercultural Communication Annual* among others. Her recent books include *Interethnic Communication* (Sage, 1986), *Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation* (Multilingual Matters, 1988), and *Theories of Intercultural Communication* (Sage, co-edited with W. Gudykunst).

PREFACE

This book is designed to be a text for a college course in intercultural communication, but anyone who communicates with people from other groups, either for pleasure or as part of his or her job, should find this book useful. To illustrate, Foreign Service Officers, Peace Corps volunteers, businesspersons in multinational or multiethnic corporations, social workers, teachers in integrated schools, staff members of hospitals in urban settings, and police officers dealing with ethnic communities, to name only a few groups, should find this book helpful in the performance of their work.

We focus on theoretical issues more than most authors of existing texts on intercultural communication. We believe that in order to understand the process of intercultural communication and to improve our intercultural effectiveness, it is necessary to have the conceptual tools to understand what is happening. As Kurt Lewin often is quoted as saying, “there is nothing so practical as a good theory.” Throughout the book, we apply the theories we have been developing over the last decade. Gudykunst’s (1988, 1991) theory of interpersonal and intergroup communication and Kim’s (1988; Kim & Ruben, 1988) theories of adaptation and intercultural growth provide the conceptual foundation for the book. While the book is theoretically grounded, we do not focus on presenting the theories. Rather, we “translate” the theories so that they can be applied to improving our communication with people from different cultures and/or ethnic groups.

Our approach is based on the premise that all interactions between people share essentially the same underlying communication process. We conceptualize the common underlying process of communication with people who are unknown and unfamiliar as communication with strangers. Intercultural communication is studied separately because the unknown and unfamiliar qualities of strangers (e.g., their culture and/or ethnicity) are not considered in interpersonal communication courses and texts.

In preparing the second edition, we thoroughly updated the first edition. We made every effort to make this edition clear and readable. We removed overly complex language and added examples to illustrate our points. Also, in updating the various chapters, we omitted redundancies and dropped material not found useful in the first edition. We added research findings that have emerged since the first edition was published.

More specifically, we added a discussion of uncertainty and anxiety and the sources of communication behavior in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2 we reorganized the overview of our approach adding material on the categorization-particularization process and mindfulness, as well as uncertainty and anxiety. The focus of this first Part—reducing uncertainty and managing anxiety—is carried throughout the book.

In Chapter 3 we expanded the material of individualism-collectivism and low- and high-context cultures, added a discussion of Hofstede’s dimensions of cultural variabil-

ity, presented a new theory of values, and added material on communication rules in subcultures in the United States. In Chapter 4 we added an extended discussion of ethnic identity and new material on interpersonal relationships and conflict across cultures. We reorganized Chapter 5 around the idea of expectations, expanded our discussion of changing attitudes and stereotypes, and added material on how uncertainty and anxiety mediate other factors to influence the effectiveness of our communication. In Chapter 6 we updated the material and incorporated the topics that were discussed in the previous edition's nonverbal chapter.

The third part was reconceptualized to focus on the role of message decoding and encoding in communicating with strangers. The attribution process is now the focus of Chapter 7 on decoding. Also included in this chapter is a discussion of how cognitive styles and patterns of thought influence our decoding of messages. We reorganized and updated the discussion of differences in verbal messages across cultures in Chapter 8. We also added a discussion of language in communicating with strangers (e.g., second language competence) to this chapter. We totally revised the chapter on nonverbal messages. It now focuses on the recognition/expression of emotions, contact versus noncontact cultures, interpersonal synchrony, and what happens when our nonverbal expectations are violated. The chapter on universals that appeared in the first edition has been omitted, but we have incorporated much of this material in other parts of the book.

The final part was expanded. We reorganized and updated the chapters on interpersonal relationships, adaptation, and becoming intercultural. We added extensive new material on effectiveness and made this chapter consistent with the perspective used throughout the book. We also added a discussion of managing conflict with strangers in this chapter. Finally, we added a new concluding chapter on building community. This chapter includes a revised discussion of ethical issues from the chapter on effectiveness in the first edition.

In rewriting the book, we have tried to be very careful in our use of language. The language we use influences how we communicate and how others interpret our behavior. It, therefore, is inappropriate to use ethnocentric or sexist language in a book on intercultural communication. We have avoided the use of the term "Americans," for example, to refer to people in the United States because people from Mexico, Latin, Central, and South America also are "Americans." We have used "North Americans" whenever possible. When it was necessary to differentiate Canada and the United States we used more specific language. To avoid sexist language, we have put "or her" in brackets whenever an author we are quoting used "him." We deliberately carried this to the extreme (e.g., inserting [or woman] in a quote from Shakespeare) to emphasize the importance of the language we use when we communicate with people from other groups. While our usage may make the reading a bit awkward in a few points, the influence of our language usage on our communication must be emphasized.

In revising the various chapters, we incorporated material from two recent books (Gudykunst, 1991; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988) published by Sage. We want to thank Sage for allowing us to use material from these books here.

Several people have influenced our approach to the study of intercultural communication and we want to take this opportunity to recognize them. The work of Harry C. Triandis and Edward T. Hall are cited in virtually every chapter of the book. These two

pioneers have had a profound effect on our work and that of most other scholars in the area. We also want to recognize the influence of Georg Simmel, whose concept of the stranger provides the foundation for our approach. The work on uncertainty by Charles Berger, and Walter Stephan's and Cookie White Stephan's work on anxiety, also serve as intellectual roots for the approach we take in the book.

Before concluding, we also want to express our gratitude to friends and colleagues who contributed their time and expertise in reviewing various versions of the book. The "official" reviewers for the first edition—Milton Bennett, Larry Sarbaugh, and Dennis Tafoya—read the entire manuscript and provided detailed critiques and suggestions. Even though we did not incorporate all their suggestions in the first edition, their comments were invaluable in helping us clarify our thinking. Several others who reviewed various chapters and gave us useful feedback on the first edition include Gordon Craigo, Huber Ellingsworth, Joan Hojek, Lois Silverman, and Stella Ting-Toomey. San Rao initially encouraged us to write the book, and Linda Fisher, our editor at Addison-Wesley for the first edition, was a constant source of support throughout the completion of the original version of the manuscript.

We also want to thank the people who helped make this second edition a reality. To begin, numerous colleagues and students provided constructive suggestions for revising the book over the years since the first edition was published. We cannot name them individually, but we want them to know that we appreciate their feedback. In addition, Stella Ting-Toomey, Alan Harris, and Adelina Gomez officially reviewed the first edition and suggested changes to be incorporated into this edition. We have attempted to incorporate as many of the suggestions we received over the years as possible. Jiro Sakai assisted in updating the references. Most important, we want to express our gratitude to Sandra Sudweeks, Stella Ting-Toomey, and Richard Wiseman, who read drafts of the chapters included in this edition. They provided valuable comments under tremendous time pressure! Finally, we want to thank Hilary Jackson, our editor at McGraw-Hill, who has been a constant source of support.

**William B. Gudykunst
Young Yun Kim**

CONTENTS

Preface xi

PART ONE

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS 1

1	
INTRODUCTION	3
Conceptualizing Communication	6
Conceptualizing Culture	12
Differentiating Terminology	13
Plan for the Book	15
Summary	16

2	
AN APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION	18
The Concept of the Stranger	19
An Overview of Communication with Strangers	22
An Organizing Model for Studying Communication with Strangers	31
Summary	37

PART TWO

INFLUENCES ON THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATING WITH STRANGERS 39

3	
CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON THE PROCESS	41
Dimensions of Cultural Variability	42
Values	53
Cultural Norms and Rules	57
Summary	62

4		
SOCIOCULTURAL INFLUENCES ON THE PROCESS		63
Memberships in Social Groups		63
Self-Conceptions		67
Intergroup and Interpersonal Communication		73
Role Relationships		75
Interpersonal Relationships		80
Summary		87
5		
PSYCHOCULTURAL INFLUENCES ON THE PROCESS		89
The Nature of Expectations		89
Stereotypes		91
Intergroup Attitudes		94
Changing Our Expectations of Strangers		104
Uncertainty and Anxiety		107
Summary		112
6		
ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES ON THE PROCESS		114
Physical Environment		115
Psychological Environment		120
Summary		130
<hr/>		
PART THREE		
<hr/>		
DECODING AND ENCODING OF MESSAGES		133
7		
MESSAGE DECODING		135
Making Attributions		136
Cognitive Styles		143
Patterns of Thought		147
Summary		151
8		
VERBAL BEHAVIOR		152
Variation in Language Usage		152
Variations in Verbal Messages		156

Language Usage in Communicating with Strangers	163
Summary	170

9

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR	172
---------------------------	-----

Emotion Recognition and Expression	173
Contact	177
Interpersonal Synchronization	180
Nonverbal Cues in Communicating with Strangers	181
Summary	186

PART FOUR

INTERACTION WITH STRANGERS	187
-----------------------------------	------------

10

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH STRANGERS	189
---	-----

The Development of Interpersonal Relationships with Strangers	190
Romantic Relationships with Strangers	205
Summary	211

11

STRANGERS' ADAPTATION TO NEW CULTURES	213
--	-----

Cross-Cultural Adaptation	214
The Role of Communication	217
Factors Influencing the Adaptive Communication Process	223
Adaptation and Psychological Health	227
Summary	228

12

EFFECTIVENESS IN COMMUNICATING WITH STRANGERS	229
--	-----

Defining Communication Effectiveness and Communication Competence	229
Approaches to the Study of Communication Effectiveness	233
Components of Perceived Competence	235
Managing Conflict with Strangers	243
Summary	245

13

BECOMING INTERCULTURAL	246
-------------------------------	-----

Encountering Different Cultures	247
The Process of Adaptive Transformation	249

The Process of Psychic Growth	250
The Intercultural Person as a Model for Human Development	253
Facilitating Intercultural Growth	255
Summary	257
14	
COMMUNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY	258
Walking a Narrow Ridge	259
Characteristics of Community	261
Community and Public Life	263
Ethical Issues in Communicating with Strangers	264
Principles of Community Building	267
Summary	268
References	270
Index	301

PART ONE

Conceptual Foundations

On April 8, 1960, the world entered a new era. On this date, the first attempt was made to communicate with extraterrestrial life as part of Project Ozma, organized by Frank Drake of the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank, West Virginia. Pioneer 10—launched on March 3, 1972—included a six- by nine-inch gold-plated aluminum plaque with a message for any extraterrestrial being coming across it. The plaque on Pioneer 10 was designed by the astronomer Carl Sagan. The left side of the plaque contained a representation of the periods of pulsars to indicate the solar system of origin, while across the bottom the planets of the solar system were drawn with an indication that Pioneer 10 originated on the third planet. The right side of the plaque contained drawings of unclothed male and female figures, the man having his right arm raised with the palm extending outward. Pictures of the plaque appeared in newspapers around the world when Pioneer 10 was launched.

What does the plaque on Pioneer 10 have to do with the study of intercultural communication? Think about it for a moment. Does the plaque have anything in common with your attempts to communicate with people from other cultures? The plaque illustrates what often happens when two people who do not share a common language try to communicate: they try to get their ideas across nonverbally. Reactions to the plaque when it appeared in newspapers around the world further illustrate what can happen when we use this method in our everyday encounters with people from other cultures. People in some cultures interpreted the man's gesture to be a universal gesture of friendliness, while people in other cultures interpreted it as one of hostility. One can only imagine how extraterrestrial beings would interpret the gesture; they might take it to mean that one arm of one of the sexes is permanently angled at the elbow while that of the other sex is not. The point is that gestures used by people in one culture often do not mean the same thing in another culture. Trying to communicate through nonverbal means may, therefore, lead to misunderstandings.

In order to minimize misunderstandings when we communicate with people from other cultures, we need to understand the process of intercultural communication. The importance of understanding this process is called to our attention by two former presidents of the United States:

So let us not be blind to our differences, but let us direct our attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can make the world safe for diversity.

—*John F. Kennedy*

It is . . . in our interest—and the interest of other nations—that Americans have the opportunity to understand the histories, cultures and problems of others, so that we can understand their hopes, perceptions and aspirations. [These efforts] will contribute to our capacity as a people and a government to manage our foreign affairs with sensitivity, in an effective and responsible way.

—*Jimmy Carter*

These two former presidents imply that understanding people of other cultures and their patterns of communication is important not only to decrease misunderstandings but also to make the world a safer place in which to live.

Throughout the book we focus on the concepts necessary to understand people from other cultures, their patterns of communication, and our interactions with them. More specifically, our intent is to present a framework for understanding your encounters with people from other cultures and subcultures, for determining when misunderstandings occur, and for improving the effectiveness of your intercultural communication.

The purpose of Part One is to outline our perspective on communication in general and intercultural communication in particular. In Chapter 1, we specify the assumptions we make about the process of communication and define the two major terms, *communication* and *culture*, used in the book. Our approach to intercultural communication is presented in Chapter 2, where we examine the concept of the stranger and outline the model we use to organize the elements in the process of communication.

1

Introduction

*Greetings. I am pleased to see that we are different.
May we together become greater than the sum of both of us.*
Vulcan Greeting (Star Trek)

In the past most human beings were born, lived, and died within a limited geographical area, never encountering people of other faces and/or cultural backgrounds. Such an existence, however, no longer prevails in the world. Even members of once isolated groups of people like the Tasadays in the Philippines now frequently have contact with members of other cultural groups. McLuhan (1962) characterized today's world as a "global village" because of the rapid expansion of worldwide transportation and communication networks (e.g., airplanes, communication satellites, and telephones). It is now possible for any person from an industrialized country to communicate with any person in another industrialized country within minutes by phone or within hours face-to-face. In fact, we are at a point in history when important or interesting events (wars, U.S. presidential debates, major sporting events, royal weddings, and so forth) in one country are often transmitted simultaneously to more than 100 different countries.

The expansion of worldwide communication networks, combined with increases in travel for pleasure or business and in international migration of refugees, heightens our awareness of the need for understanding other cultures and their people. The work of the Presidential Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (1979) illustrates this increased awareness. In its final report to the President of the United States, the Commission points out that:

nothing less is at issue than the nation's security. At a time when the resurgent forces of nationalism and of ethnic and linguistic consciousness so directly affect global realities, the United States requires far more reliable capacities to communicate with its allies, analyze the behavior of potential adversaries, and earn the trust and sympathies of the uncommitted. Yet there is a widening gap between these needs and the [North] American competence to understand and deal successfully with other peoples in a world in a flux. (pp. 1-2)

The problems isolated by the Presidential Commission in 1979 are applicable and even more important today. The Commission set forth a number of recommendations in order for the people of the United States to understand and deal successfully with other peoples of the world, including increased foreign language instruction, more international educational exchanges, citizen education in international affairs, and increases in international training for business and government personnel. Although it is not stated explicitly, central to most of the Commission's recommendations is the need for an increased awareness and understanding of communication between people from different cultures.

In a world of international interdependence, the ability to understand and communicate effectively with people from other cultures takes on extreme urgency. The need for intercultural understanding, however, does not begin or end with national boundaries. Within any nation a multitude of racial and ethnic groups exist, and their members interact daily. Legislation and legal rulings in the United States on affirmative action, school busing, and desegregation underscore the importance of nondiscriminatory contact between members of different racial and ethnic groups. The importance of good intergroup relations also is apparent when current demographic trends are examined. It is projected, for example, that in the near future the workplace will change from a place dominated by white males to a place dominated by women, immigrants, and nonwhite ethnics (Hudson Institute, 1987). For work to be accomplished effectively in the multicultural organization, people of different racial and ethnic groups need to understand one another's cultures and patterns of communication.

It is recognized widely that one of the characteristics separating humans from other animals is our development of culture. The development of human culture is made possible through communication, and it is through communication that culture is transmitted from one generation to another. Culture and communication are intertwined so closely that Hall (1959) maintains that "culture is communication" and "communication is culture." In other words, we communicate the way we do because we are raised in a particular culture and learn its language, rules, and norms. Because we learn the language, rules, and norms of our culture by a very early age (between five and ten years old), however, we generally are unaware of how culture influences our behavior in general and our communication in particular.

When we communicate with people from other cultures, we often are confronted with languages, rules, and norms different from our own. Confronting these

differences can be a source of insight into the rules and norms of our own culture, as well as being a source of frustration or gratification. Although the presence of cultural differences may suggest the need for accommodation in our communication, it cannot be taken automatically as either a barrier or a facilitator of effective communication (Ellingsworth, 1977). Communication between people from different cultures can be as effective as communication between people from the same culture (Taylor & Simard, 1975). Stated in another way, communicating with a person from another culture may be either easier or more difficult than communicating with someone from the same culture.

One of the major factors influencing our effectiveness in communicating with people from other cultures is our ability to understand their culture. It is impossible to understand the communication of people from other cultures if we are highly ethnocentric. Sumner (1940) characterizes ethnocentrism as the “view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (p. 27). Ethnocentrism leads us to see our own culture’s way of doing things as “right” and all others as “wrong.” While the tendency to make judgments according to our own cultural standards is natural, it hinders our understanding of other cultures and the patterns of communication of their people. Becoming more culturally relativistic, on the other hand, can be conducive to understanding.

Cultural relativism suggests that the only way we can understand the behavior of others is in the context of their culture. Herskovits (1973) succinctly summarizes this position when he says evaluations must be “relative to the cultural background out of which they arise” (p. 14). No one cultural trait is “right” or “wrong”; it is merely “different” from alternative cultural traits. This is not to say we must never make value judgments of people in other cultures. Making them is often necessary (see Chapter 12). Postponing these value judgments, or recognizing their tentative nature, until adequate information is gathered and we understand the people from the other culture, however, greatly facilitates understanding and effective communication.

The purpose of this book is to provide the conceptual tools needed to understand culture, communication, how culture influences communication, and the process of communication between people from different cultures. Such knowledge is extremely important. In fact, it is necessary if we are to comprehend fully the daily events of today’s multicultural world. The concepts discussed should help you better understand your communication with people from other cultures. Understanding the material presented also should help you not only analyze your intercultural encounters in order to determine where misunderstandings occur, but also determine how these misunderstandings can be minimized in future interactions. Before proceeding further, we must be more specific about what we mean when we use the terms *communication*, *culture*, and *intercultural communication*. In the next section we outline the assumptions we make about the nature of communication. Following this we examine the concept of culture and develop a working definition for intercultural communication.